IN OUR HANDS

EARTH SUMMIT

United Nations
Conference on
Environment and
Development

Rio de Janeiro
Brazil
1-12 June 1992

UNITED NATIONS

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United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

The first-ever "Earth Summit"—the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)—will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 1 to 12 June 1992.

"The primary goal of the Summit will be to lay the foundation for a global partnership between developing and more industrialized countries, based on mutual need and common interests, to ensure the future of the planet," states Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the Conference. "We need to find a viable and equitable balance between environment and development."

A highlight of the Conference will be the observance of World Environment Day on 5 June 1992, the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972.

In Stockholm, environment was placed on the world agenda. The Brazil Summit will ensure that the issue becomes central to policy-making and -implementation in almost every sector of economic life. It will seek agreement on concrete measures to reconcile economic activities with the need to protect the planet and ensure a sustainable future for all people.

The General Assembly has decided that Member States should be represented at the Conference by Heads of State or Government. It is expected to be the largest summit meeting to date. International organizations, non-governmental groups and private-sector interests will also take part in an unprecedented attempt to mobilize people to set a new and more hopeful course for the future of humanity.

Background

The relationship between economic development and environmental impact was recognized at the Stockholm Conference. It was also the focus of *Our Common Future*, the 1987 report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development.

However, between 1972 and 1987, too little was done to integrate, in practical terms, concerns for development and the environment in economic planning and decision-making. Progress was made in specific instances but overall the environment of the planet deteriorated. Ozone depletion, global warming and other major environmental problems grew more serious.

In December 1989, the United Nations called for a conference that would take steps to reverse trends and establish the basis for a sustainable way of life on the planet as we move into the twenty-first century.

The Issues at Stake

In an effort to maintain the quality of the environment and achieve environmentally sound, sustainable development in all countries, the Conference will address:

- protection of the atmosphere (climate change, depletion of the ozone layer, transboundary air-pollution);
- protection of land resources (combating deforestation, soil loss, desertification and drought);
- conservation of biological diversity;
- protection of freshwater resources;
- protection of oceans, seas and coastal areas, and the rational use and development of their living resources;
- environmentally sound management of biotechnology and hazardous wastes (including toxic chemicals);
- prevention of illegal traffic in toxic products and wastes;
- improvement in the quality of life and human health;
- improvement in living and working conditions of the poor by eradicating poverty and stopping environmental degradation.

The Conference will look at underlying patterns of development which cause stress to the environment. Poverty in developing countries, levels of economic growth, unsustainable patterns of consumption, demographic pressures and the impact of the international economy are development issues that will be addressed.

Earth Summit Objectives

The Conference is expected to produce:

- an Earth Charter that will embody basic principles which must govern the economic and environmental behaviour of peoples and nations to ensure "our common future";
- Agenda 21, a blueprint for action in all major areas affecting the relationship between the environment and the economy. It will focus on the period up to the year 2000 and extend into the twenty-first century;
- the means to carry out the agenda by making available to developing countries the additional financial resources and environmentally sound technologies they require to participate fully in global environmental co-operation and to integrate environmental considerations into development policies and practices;
- agreement on strengthening institutions in order to implement these measures;
- conventions on climate change, biological diversity and, perhaps, forestry may be negotiated prior to the Conference and signed or agreed to in Brazil.

The Road to Brazil

A Preparatory Committee, open to all Member States, has been established to oversee preparations for the 1992 Conference, under the chairmanship of Ambassador T. Koh of Singapore. Following an organizational session in March 1990 in New York, the Committee held its first substantive session in August in Nairobi, Kenya. Two Working Groups have been set up to assist the Committee and a third is to be established.

In 1991, the Preparatory Committee and the Working Groups will convene from 18 March to 5 April and from 12 to 30 August, in Geneva. Both meetings may be extended by one week. The final session will take place in New York in February/March 1992.

In preparation for the Conference, meetings are also being held regionally. The first took place in Bergen, Norway, in May 1990 for European countries. This was followed by a gathering in Bangkok, Thailand, in October 1990 for Asia and the Pacific. A meeting will take place in Mexico City in March 1991 for Latin America and the Caribbean. Others, with time and place still to be finalized, will take place in Africa and Western Asia.

National Reports

As part of preparations, reports are being prepared by Member States to reflect national experiences and perspectives on environment and development. Guidelines for the national reports were adopted by the Preparatory Committee in August 1990.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and citizens groups are expected to participate in the preparation of the reports, which should be submitted to the UNCED secretariat no later than July 1991.

Developing Country Participation

Developing countries have an important stake in the Summit: their participation in the Conference and its preparations is critical for its success. They fully share the hazards resulting from global environmental damage, although the problem has been caused mostly by the activities of industrialized countries which have also gained most of the economic benefits.

The co-operation of developing countries is essential if the integrity of the environment is to be secured. Such co-operation can be expected only if the development of these countries is given new impetus and direction.

Supplementary funding and technology must be made available to developing countries to enable them to integrate environmental concerns into development programmes, and make the transition to sustainable development. Agreement on this will be the most important challenge confronting the 1992 Conference.

Non-governmental Participation

The Earth Summit will be a conference of leaders of Governments but its success will largely depend on the interest and support of peoples and their active participation in NGOs and citizens groups which will contribute to its preparations. Provision has been made for relevant NGOs to participate in meetings of the Preparatory Committee. A parallel event will be held by non-governmental groups in Rio de Janeiro at the time of the Summit.

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Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information
DPI/1118—40234—March 1991—50M